

CLAIM AMENDMENTS

Claims 1-13 (Cancelled).

14. (New) An automated computer-to-plate apparatus comprising:

a plurality of cassettes, each cassette containing a supply of printing plates of a particular characteristic,

a plurality of vertically-spaced supports wherein a separate support corresponds to each cassette and holds each corresponding cassette;

an elevator that operatively holds and moves the supports and corresponding cassettes, wherein the elevator positions a first support holding a first cassette to a first level so that the first cassette may move substantially horizontally on the first support at the first level;

a surface in proximity to the first support so as to form a substantially horizontal extension of the first support that is vertically fixed at the first level and permits the first cassette to move substantially horizontally between the first support and the surface and, when at least a portion of the first cassette is on the surface, the surface is used for one of unloading the first cassette or accessing the printing plates in the first cassette.

15. (New) The computer-to-plate apparatus as set forth in claim 14 comprising:
a drum imaging engine for putting an image onto one of the printing plates, wherein the elevator automatically positions the supports and plurality of cassettes to place a second cassette having the printing plate characteristic required by the image to a second level relative to the imaging engine; and

a picker for automatically removing a single printing plate from the second cassette and delivering the single printing plate to the drum imaging engine wherein the drum imaging engine puts the image onto the single printing plate to form an imaged printing plate.

16. (New) The computer to plate apparatus as set forth in claim 14 wherein at least one printing plate may be removed from the first cassette when the first cassette is on the surface.

17. (New) The computer to plate apparatus as set forth in claim 14 wherein at least one printing plate may be loaded into the first cassette when the first cassette is on the surface.

18. (New) The computer to plate apparatus as set forth in claim 14 comprising a controller in operative communication with the elevator and controlling the movement of the elevator.

19. (New) The computer to plate apparatus as set forth in claim 14 comprising a controller in operative communication with the elevator and generating command signals, wherein each support and corresponding cassette on each support are moved in response to the command signals.

20. (New) The computer to plate apparatus as set forth in claim 14 wherein the surface may be pivoted to a substantially vertical position so as to form a door for blocking access to the first cassette on the first support.

21. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 14, comprising an identification code on the first cassette identifying information about the printing plates in the first cassette, and means for communicating the identification code to the controller.

22. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 14 wherein the supports hold the cassettes in a substantially horizontal orientation.

23. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 14 wherein the surface holds the first cassette in a substantially horizontal orientation.

24. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 14 comprising a frame, and the surface is pivotally attached to the frame for movement between horizontal and vertical positions, wherein in the vertical position, the surface forms a door for blocking access to the first cassette on the first support, and wherein in the horizontal position, the surface forms the substantially horizontal extension.

25. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 14 comprising cassette movement means for facilitating smooth and easy movement of the first cassette between the first support and the surface.

26. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 25 comprising a plurality of first wheels mounted to the surface for facilitating smooth and easy movement of the first cassette between the surface and first support.

27. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 25 wherein the cassette movement means comprises a plurality of second wheels mounted to the first support facilitating smooth and easy movement of the first cassette between the surface and first support.

28. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 14 comprising guide means for guiding the first cassette between the first support and the surface.

29. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 28 wherein the guide means comprises an alignment feature on the first cassette that assists in properly orientating the first cassette and the plurality of first wheels on the surface.

30. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 28 wherein the guide means comprises an alignment feature on the first cassette that assists in properly orientating the first cassette and the plurality of first wheels on the surface and the

plurality of second wheels on the first support during unloading and loading of the first cassette on the surface.

31. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 14 comprising an underside and an upperside for each support, said upperside providing a support surface for the cassette and wherein the supports include a lowermost support and upper supports positioned vertically above the lowermost support;

 a brace attached to the underside of a lowermost support and the elevator such that the elevator raises and lowers the brace and the lowermost support along a vertical axis; and

 a plurality of table spacers attached to the underside of each of the upper supports and in contact with the support immediately below the support that the spacers are attached to, such that each of the upper supports is supported by the support immediately below and movable along the vertical axis with the lowermost support.

32. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 31 further comprising an actuating device for engaging the upper support and for separating the upper support from the support immediately below as the elevator lowers the lowermost support.

33. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 14 comprising a drum imaging engine for putting an image onto one of the printing plates to form an imaged plate, and

 at least one vacuum member for automatically attaching directly to the top of a single printing plate in the first cassette, and removing the single printing plate from the first cassette, and delivering the single printing plate to the drum imaging engine wherein the vacuum member remains attached to the top of the single printing plate until the drum imaging engine receives the single printing plate.

34. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 33 comprising a plate processor for processing the imaged printing plate.

35. (New) The computer to plate apparatus as set forth in claim 34 comprising a controller in operative communication with the elevator and generating command signals, wherein each support and corresponding cassette on each support are moved in response to the command signals.

36. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 34 wherein the supports hold the cassettes in a substantially horizontal orientation.

37. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 34 wherein the surface holds the first cassette in a substantially horizontal orientation.

38. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 34 comprising cassette movement means for facilitating smooth and easy movement of the first cassette between the first support and the surface.

39. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 34 comprising a plurality of first wheels mounted to the surface for facilitating smooth and easy movement of the first cassette between the surface and first support.

40. (New) The computer to plate apparatus according to claim 34 wherein the cassette movement means comprises a plurality of second wheels mounted to the first support facilitating smooth and easy movement of the first cassette between the surface and first support.